

Election Round-Up: The Genius of Deborah

We are into the home stretch. There are only 2 weeks left in the 10-week election campaign. The last polls were taken in February 2019. Since then a great deal has happened that can have an impact on the inclination of voters. Those polls – by IRR, Afric, Ipsos and others indicated that the ANC had a commanding lead over any other party. *But not a commanding Majority*. In fact, in an election campaign, 6 weeks (since those polls were taken) can be a LONG time!

I have lumped some emerging factors into four clusters. The first two relate to the front runner, the ANC. The second two relate to the Opposition parties – now composed of no less than 47 other contenders! Both pairs start with a list of factors that could increase their favour with the Electorate. Then, in both cases, a list of factors that can cause their respective fortunes to back-slide. Remember, this is a round-up so there is no scoop, no breaking news. But the trends are telling...

The following news headlines – since the last polls were published - could benefit the ANC:

- A final decision on Land Reform has been punted until after the elections
- Moody's granted a stay of execution and did not downgrade South Africa's credit rating
- The Rand has wobbled but not crashed below R15-to-the-dollar mark
- Ramaphosa has scored in appointing Shamila Batohi as NDPP and has managed to stave off Tom Moyane's counter-offensive

But there are many more factors that could cost the ANC some votes:

- Electricity and fuel price hikes are unpopular
- Guptamania was upstaged by Bosasa's ex-COO Agrizzi's second appearance at the Zondo Commission and Robert McBride's testimony ("*Agrizzi was sleazy but McBride is our pride*")
- Conflict between Police Minister Cele and Commissioner Sithole
- Jesse Duarte's tirade against the media
- Ignoring or at least down-grading the Integrity Commission's influence internally
- Release of Gangster State – a book about Ace Magashule's Free State, and the book-burning
- Video of Magashule apparently bribing a voter to vote for the Patronage Party
- Lapses into more load-shedding, and the huge cost of keeping the lights on
- A sense that voters are being kept in the dark about what is really going on at Eskom, and who is paying to run the elections (is that where the looted money is being laundered?)
- The strike at Sibanye fizzled out, indicating that the split in organized labour has weakened it
- Rumbblings of xenophobia as Rwanda celebrates the 25th anniversary of its Genocide
- Turn-overs of old regimes in Algeria and Sudan and Al-Bashir's arrest (premonitions?)

The bad news is that it is easier to tote up the bungling, than the gains that were made by the ANC. This does not bode well for its impact on voters.

Now over to the Opposition side. These parties are smaller - but they are many. First some factors that could work in their favour:

- Msimang left Tshwane with a budget surplus – even though he had inherited a budget deficit when the DA-led coalition took over in 2016
- Signs that the IFP is gaining back lost ground in KZN – if by-elections are anything to go by
- GOOD seems to be consolidating the coloured vote
- The combined opposition may not overtake the ANC in the National Assembly, but several Provincial governments could end up being DA-led, IFP-led, and/or EFF-led
- Belief that un-employment is synonymous with “land hunger” has been swayed into a rising recognition that affirmative action could be part of the Job problem, not of its solution
- A perception that urban issues are more prevalent than rural. For example, that “land hunger” means housing plots in peri-urban areas – more than land to farm
- Fragmentation into 48 parties on the ballot helps the Opposition. It gives voters more than a “yes or no” choice – it gives them a menu of flavours to choose from
- Julius “Houdini” Malema escaped sanction for Hate Speech
- Opposition parties may differ with one another, but they do not contradict *themselves* like the ANC is doing repeatedly. They stand for something finish and klaar. No shadow-boxing
- Both the DA’s Maimane and the EFF’s Mpofo are talking openly “in praise of coalitions”. This may signal a change of policy within the EFF?

And on this side of the ledger, some regrets that could cost the Opposition some support:

- The New Nation Movement lost its court bid to allow Independent candidates to run
- EFF will probably lose the support of Security Guards, because they have their own party now
- Mashaba delayed in visiting Alex

This scoping of news headlines suggests that the Opposition parties are making more headway, scoring more favourables than bungles. The centrifugal force that opens up the “swing vote” to the Opposition (albeit fragmented into 47 parties) may overcome the gravitational pull of the ANC juggernaut. The key questions that voters are left asking are:

- Has the looting and plundering really stopped?
- Will Ramaphosa survive a “putch” after the elections?
- How long will the national power grid hold up?
- What will unemployed Youth do?
- Can the ANC really heal and rule at the same time?
- Can a Coalition of very different parties really function smoothly?

In the Book of Judges, only one of those leaders was a woman. She was Deborah. What she recognized was that no one tribe of ancient Israel could beat the enemy. Only by joining forces could they hang on to their Promised Land.

This was always the genius of the ANC. Various indigenous tribes had tried to fight off Colonialism, without success. Only by joining forces into one single movement could the Majority ever hope to win.

This has now become the genius of the Opposition too. There is no one party that can overtake the ANC. But a Clean Coalition is within reach. The real “challenger” in this 2019 election is not another political party, but ALL OF THEM WORKING TOGETHER.

However, there is no such Coalition on the ballot. Voters have to pick one party, and that Clean Coalition is therefore a Goal, not an Objective which is more immediate and more specific. But the top brass in the Opposition parties are already starting to talk the talk of Coalition. It remains to be seen whether the Electorate will give them the opportunity to walk the talk.